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ABSTRACT

Provided a structural selection method is carried out, it is possible to find quality early childhood personnel. The hiring process involves five definite steps, each of which establishes a base for the next. A needs assessment formulating basic minimal qualifications is the first step. The second step involves review of current job descriptions and evaluation forms. While most directors do not have problems with the third step, recruiting applicants, a major recruitment problem exists when no process of screening is followed and the "less than best" is hired. The fourth step, the selection process, is the most time-consuming. At this stage, as much information as possible is gathered about each applicant who meets minimum qualifications; usually this information is obtained through the application form and the interview process. If used appropriately, the application is the best device for screening potential employees. Interviews should be conducted with four major outcomes in mind: to predict job success, to learn how much the candidate knows about the area, to determine the candidate's application of knowledge, and to learn about the applicant's value system. Written interviews are best, but verbal questioning is the interview technique most frequently used. The interview should be conducted according to specific guidelines, and a rating scale should be used to compare applicants. The fifth and concluding step in the hiring process encompasses induction procedures that establish a formal orientation program for the new employee. (RH)

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A SELECTION METHOD THAT SUCCEEDS!

BY

CATHERYN J. WEITMAN

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Not too long ago, I needed to hire a teacher for a two-year old class. An ad was placed in the local paper and other resources were contacted. As I came to work a few days later, I couldn't believe the response from the ad! Fifty-six people eventually completed applications. As I glanced through the stack of papers I thought, "There is no way I'm going to interview all of these applicants!" Out of desperation, I <u>had</u> to develop a method of selecting the one employee I needed. The time it took to fish her out of those fifty-six applications was worth all the effort I put forth.

It has been stated that administrators of early childhood programs wear many different hats. In most cases, one of those is that of the personnel director--the one who hires the staff, among other duties. Needless to say, many directors are not trained nor adequately prepared to wear such a "hat."

Staff selection is not an easy task, especially when minimal salaries are the norm. But it is possible to find quality personnel provided a structural selection method is designed and carried out. The hiring process involves several very definite steps--each setting the foundation for the next plateau, as seen in Figure 1.

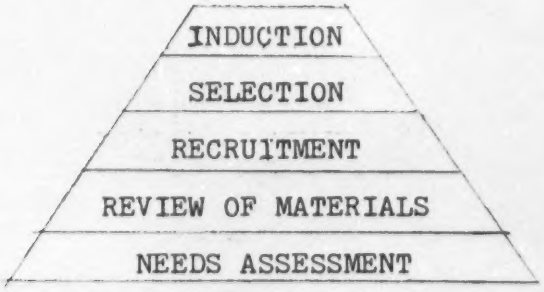

Figure 1.

A needs assessment is elementary. Make sure you know what type of employee you are seeking--know the qualifications desired, whether experience and/or education is important, whether the applicant needs certification, and the type of personality traits you are seeking. For example, if I needed to hire a cook, I would want someone who knew about nutritional values in foods; was imaginative with leftovers; and had prior cooking experience for large groups. In essence, a needs assessment has formulated some basic minimal qualifications being sought--thus making the search easier.

The second step involves review of current job descriptions and evaluation forms. (If job decriptions and evaluations are non-existent, new staff openings provide a great opportunity to complete them!) These items establish key qualifications in applicants. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2.

Turn the items listed in the job description and the evaluation form into interview questions. If you are going to require a person to teach concepts from concrete to abstract (as included in the job description), and then further evaluate that skill; then during the selection process look for that ability. Using this skill, an interview question becomes:

HOW WOULD YOU TEACH THE CONCEPT OF HARD AND SOFT?

Evaluation of the response will show you whether the applicant can in fact teach from concrete to abstract.

Most directors do not have problems with recruiting applicants. Sources vary from placing want ads to word-of-mouth. However, a major problem of recruitment exists when no process for screening is followed and then the "less than best" is hired. When this occurs, we tend to lower our standards, which effects the quality of the program and then the center is not able to operate at its peak.

The selection process is the most time consuming of all the steps, perhaps because it is through this step that we try to gather as much knowledge as possible about each acceptable applicant (i.e. those that meet the minimum qualifications as set above). How is this information gathered? Several techniques can be employed. However, the most common are the application blank and interview.

The application is the best device for screening potential employees. It can easily weed out unlikely candidates and select those that do meet the minimum standards set earlier in the hiring process. A few guidelines concerning applications need mentioning. First, request that the applicant complete the application in long-hand. The benefit of this is that it provides the interviewer with a key to the applicant's command of the English language (remember "role models!"). Second, application questions must meet all Equal Employment Opportunity Commisson (EEOC) regulations. Be sure to use non-discriminatory statements. Statements concerning sex, date of birth, age, marital status, etc. are most often considered discriminatory and should be avoided. Ask only job-related questions. Finally, a strong personal recommendation is to keep all applications on file for a year. It is a good source to return to for future substitutes and/or other job vacancies.

If an application is completed in person, a pre-interview screening may be held. The major purpose of this is to rule out uninterested parties and to present generalities and basic information regarding the job opening. Discuss the process for application review and selection. The pre-interview is not the time to conduct a formal interview. Should "notes" need to be taken about an individual, resist writing on the application blank itself, as "notes" may be interpreted as disriminatory at a later date. "Notes," if needed, should be written elsewhere and attached to the application

The responsibility for an interview may encompass a variety of people, or it may involve only one person. Often those involved in the interviewing process include: a board of directors--in which case the director of the program should make the final decision; parents; other employees (e.g. teachers); or the director alone, which is often the most common. It is further becoming popular to require a second interview for selected candidates.

The major task of the interview is four-fold:

1. To predict job success;
2. To obtain a level of knowledge in the area of employment (e.g. How much does a candidate for a three-year old teaching position know about child development?);
3. To determine the application of knowledge; and
4. To learn about the applicant's value system (e.g. Does it coincide with the center's? How does the interviewee feel about working mothers?).

To achieve these four objectives, the professional will develop a structural interviewing technique that needs to be reliable; provide valid information; and again meet EEOC regulations. A written

process, whether it be a standardized interview test (e.g. Omaha) or formulated questions, is best. A written technique can be used with all applicants; will usually avoid any legal entanglements; and it fairly discourages outside pressure to hire "friends" or family members.

There are several interview techniques that can be employed; however, verbally questioning the applicant is the most frequently used process. Because of its popularity, it is important to keep in mind these key ideas:

--Be prepared. Know what you are asking before the interview and why. Glance over the application just before the applicant arrives for the interview.
--All questions need to be related to the job description and performance evaluation forms.
--Beware of the legality of questions asked.
--Be consistent with the questions and ask the same questions to all applicants. (Another advantage to a written interview technique!)
--Use open-ended job related questions. These are questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" response and often begin with "why, how, what, describe, react to, etc."
--Interviews should be no longer that forty-five minutes in length, and should be scheduled one hour apart to allow for evaluation.
--All interviews should be completed in a weeks time.
--Remember the most important job an <u>interviewer</u> has is to <u>listen</u>, doing no more than twenty percent of the talking.
--And most importantly, the interview is a dual process. It allows the employer to gather information as well as allowing the interviewee to obtain information on

the employer. Allow for the applicant to ask questions. Finally, beware of some major pitfalls that occur during interviews. These include: failing to establish a rapport with the applicant; unaware of what you are looking for in an applicant; focussing on the applicant's personality and not on abilities; the interviewer does most of the talking; scheduling short interviews, as they do not allow adequate judgements to be made on the candidates; the interviewer's opinion of the candidate may be based on previous or future interviews; and interviewers may be influenced by certain traits (e.g. obesity may be seen as unfavorable in an employee).

To complete the interview process, a rating scale needs to be designed as a means of comparison between applicants. The items on the rating scale again should correspond to the job description and evaluation form. (See Figure 3.)

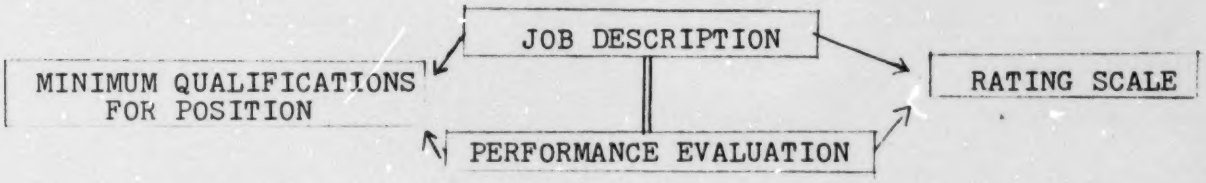

Figure 3.

The best method for a rating scale combines a point system and a short longhand reaction to each applicant interviewed.

By the time I have scheduled an interview, I have already obtained a feeling for the individual from the written application. By asking the typical philosophical questions on the application (e.g. "State your reason for choosing education as a profession."), I can spend more time during the interview to learn about the values and qualities the applicant possesses. This is accomplished by

devising life-like situational questions that require the candidate's reaction, always aware that <u>any</u> answer is acceptable. In Figure 4., the quality of "creativity" is used as an example in relating the whole hiring process:

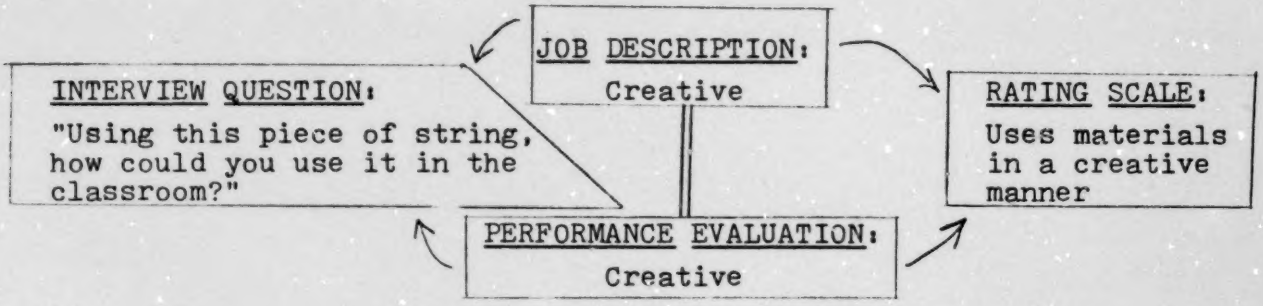

Figure 4.

When the formality is completed, end the interview. Be sure to inform the applicant of when and how a decision and notification will be made (e.g. letter, telephone call, etc.). Also request that each person interviewed complete an interview evaluation form at their lesuire; unsigned; and returned, preferably, to another administrator, in a stamped pre-addressed envelop. This provides an excellent method of feedback on the current techniques employed.

As soon as the employer's decision is finalized, all applicants, even those <u>not</u> interviewed, should be notified that the vacany has been filled. Generally, all that is necessary is a brief letter thanking them for their interest.

The final foundation block in the hiring process encompasses induction. Briefly, this establishes a formal orientation program for the new employee. The use of slides; implementing a "buddy" sustem; location of supplies; etc. are a few of the methods used in induction programs.

The search for excellent staffs is long, complicated, and initially time consuming. A structural process can be used fairly for all applicants; and once developed, it can be varied for future vacancies easily. The effort put into the process will be valuable and worthwhile in the long run when the hired employee performs to quality expectations.

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